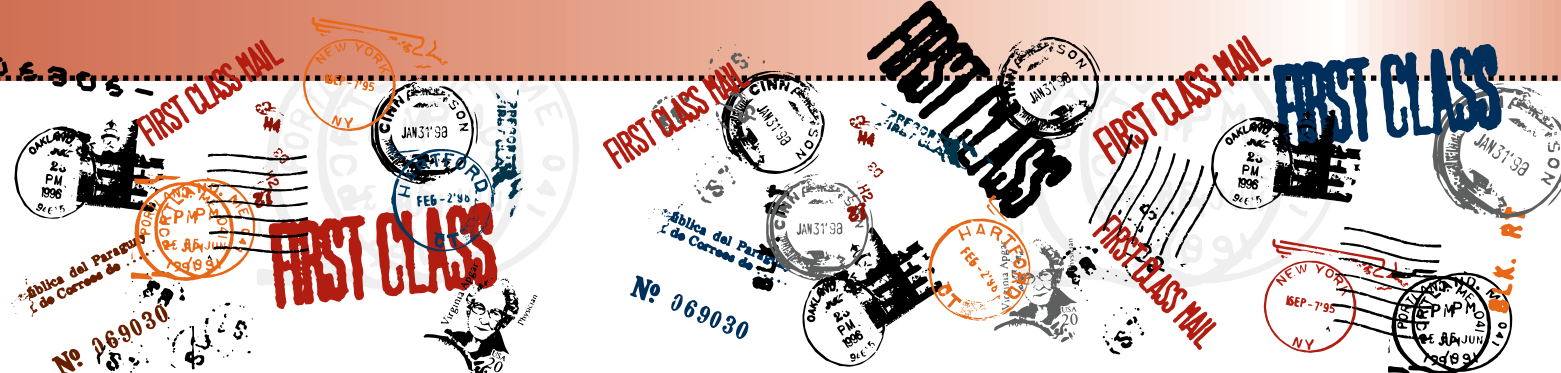


COMMENTS

Got something to say about Airman? Write us at airman@dma.mil, or visit www.AIRMANonline.af.mil, to share views with fellow readers.



PATCH

Dear Sirs,
I'd like to respond to the letter Senior Master Sgt. Joe Kost sent in [the July/August 2008 issue] that referenced a C-130 Hercules pilot wearing an inappropriate patch [on page 12 of the May/June issue.] A picture is worth a thousand words. This letter will take a few of those words to explain the origins of that picture. I am a full-time C-130 aircraft mechanic for the Texas Air National Guard. I was deployed as the dedicated crew chief for Capt. Melinda Hammond's aircrew during its rotation to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, earlier this year. She was the person in the photo.

In my career, I've been deployed to many combat zones. Aircrews flying into harm's way sometimes utilize what are unofficially referred to as "combat air patches." Such patches are worn only during flight and customarily on missions into hazardous locations. These "combat air patches" may contain false names, silly slogans or misleading symbols that have an underlying and humorous cultural meaning to our aircrews, yet signify absolutely nothing to potential enemies. In my opinion, the reason for this is two-fold.

First, these patches serve as "disinformation" in the unfortunate event that a crew member falls into enemy hands during such a mission. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the patches also serve as a harmless morale booster in what can be long and highly stressful flights for the crews.

I know for a fact that Captain Hammond had entirely removed all of her patches during the photo shoot and interview with an Airman staff member. I also wish to emphatically state that she was in the process of returning to the aircraft before she began replacing the patches. It was at this time that the photographer called out to her and snapped a picture as she turned. It was this picture that appeared in the article. Now, the sergeant's concern regarding the proper wearing and display of the Air Force uniform is understandable, particularly when it comes to the American flag patch. But his suggestion that Captain Hammond "poorly represented the Air Force" may be a bit harsh.

RECRUITER



I truly enjoyed reading the article on the Great Falls, Montana, recruiter [July/August 2008]. In this difficult time of retention and recruitment of the best personnel in the service of our country, Tech. Sgt. Frank McMahon appears to put a very positive face on the U.S. Air Force. Resources today are greatly strained, and the picture

of a vehicle being driven a vast amount of miles doesn't seem like the best use of taxpayer funds. If this is the norm for recruiting transportation, with more fuel efficient vehicles we may be able to reduce the \$7,900 per enlistee cost.

Retired
Master Sgt. Gregory Duncan

Captain Hammond is an excellent C-130 pilot and performed admirably as an aircraft commander during a particularly high-tempo period of our rotation.

She flew long hours while our airlift wing rotated out ground fighting units, air dropped ammunition to mountain tops and delivered food, water and other critical supplies during tense off-loads with engines running. And even on the longest days, in the most adverse environmental conditions, she always provided a smiling face and a positive attitude. I was proud to be a part of her team.

I've taken the time to answer the sergeant's assertion because I feel the real issue here is not the proper wear of the Air Force uniform, even with the disparaging inclusion of the American flag patch. To me, the critical

concern here is one of discipline. To those who've never served in a forward-combat environment and who may witness that particular picture out of context, this episode may seem to be a gross lack of discipline. Lack of discipline and the projection of such, is our worst enemy in a combat zone, and I take it personally when my unit may be associated with such. But other individuals, informed of the circumstances and perhaps seeing the picture in a different context, may instead see a proud professional who expertly and selflessly served her country in trying and adverse circumstances.

Tech. Sgt. Michael Phineas
136th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron,
Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base
Carswell Field, Texas

EVOLUTION OF FITNESS



The [July/August 2008] Airman online edition features a background [image] of the evolution of man from apes behind the words 'FITTER' to fight.

I think this is the wrong image/sight picture for our Air Force and conflicts with our core values.

Thank You
Paul Weselo

MEMORIES

I have just received my first issue of Airman magazine, and it has brought back many wonderful memories of my 20 years in the Air Force. It is ironic that two of your articles on the Wolf Pack — one we used to call the "MASDC" (Military Aircraft Storage and Disposition Center) — were my last two active-duty assignments. The article on the young person who lost her life at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, brought back memories of my days at Camp Bullis (Military Training Reservation in San Antonio, Texas) prior to my departure to an overseas assignment.

While many things have changed over the years, I can see by the articles in your magazine that the men and women of the Air Force have continued to maintain the same high level of professionalism and compassion that I encountered when I was on active duty. While there have been some problems recently in our service, I have no doubt that those issues will be resolved, and we will be even better, stronger and more professional than before.

Please extend my thanks, by whatever means possible, to all of these exceptional people from an old, but still very proud, retired member of the finest service in the Nation.

Retired
Maj. David T. Williams



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